

02051

1968/03/04

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~Monday, March 4, 1968
1:45 p. m.

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MR. PRESIDENT:

SUBJECT: The Clifford Committee

1. After much debate, ~~there should be before you at 5:30 this afternoon an agreed paper.~~

2. The essence of the agreement is:

-- ~~We should send to Westy in, say, the next three months, whatever we can send him that would be helpful in the tense battle he may face before the weather changes; but the condition of our Reserves does not permit us to get much to him in this time interval (perhaps 30,000).~~

-- ~~We should call up Reserves sufficient to meet the rest of his requirement if it is later judged that the rest of his request must and should be met;~~

-- ~~These two actions require that we reconstitute the U.S. strategic Reserve.~~ The exact scale of this reconstitution has not been agreed in the group nor the exact recommended combination of increased draft call and Reserve call-up. All hands agree, however, that our basic national security position requires the reconstitution of our Reserve position ~~if we are not to tempt aggressors in various parts of the world.~~

3. ~~It was agreed that we should make a maximum effort to encourage and induce improved Vietnamese military and political performance.~~ The particular headings for discussion with and pressure on the GVN are pretty well worked out.

As part of this effort ~~there should be a program for improving the equipment of the ARVN;~~ and a rough package has been worked out for that purpose of, say, \$400 million.

4. ~~It was agreed that there should be a fresh review of our strategy in Viet Nam;~~ that this should be urgently conducted and ~~completed before you are asked to make a commitment to send Westy forces beyond the tranche recommended for the next three months.~~

5. On the economic side, ~~Joe Fowler would propose that the increased budgetary outlay for Fiscal 68-69 be offset dollar for dollar mainly by a tax increase;~~ but he believes a ~~program reduction of civilian outlays in Fiscal 69.~~

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Authority

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By

isb, NARS, Date 7-8-85

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~~will be required in the \$2-\$3 billion range.~~ He has further recommendations in the field of manpower policy and administration and wage/price policy, but does not recommend formal wage and price controls. Since the recommended package is only now beginning to take shape, Secretary Fowler has not discussed it with Okun, Zwick, or Califano.

Discussion

You should know that the discussion we have had in these days has been colored by ~~one major uncertainty~~ and a ~~widely shared reservation~~. The uncertainty is: ~~what are enemy capabilities, and what are U.S. and ARVN capabilities in the days, weeks, and several months ahead?~~

~~We all have the feeling that the battle is likely to be pretty close. If the enemy brings in additional North Vietnamese forces, it could become dangerous for our side; and it will go badly for our side unless we can induce the ARVN to go out and fight in the countryside. On the other hand, if we and the ARVN prove capable of taking the offensive along the lines in Westy's latest cable, we could make 1968 the year of decision. Thus, the performance of the Vietnamese and the ARVN is critical and the exact state of the enemy which we won't know until we engage him or he engages us. Therefore, in looking ahead over the next months and considering Westy's request, we don't know whether we are being asked to send forces to prevent a radical deterioration in our side's position, or to permit him to conduct in the second half of the year a vigorous offensive.~~

~~The reservation, which goes deep in State and Defense, is that the additional forces would constitute a gross over commitment of U.S. military resources to Viet Nam without bringing us closer to a resolution of the problem.~~ Behind that judgment, in turn, is a feeling that we can only attain our objectives in Viet Nam by a negotiation which brings the Viet Cong into the political process, and this negotiation, in turn, may not be much advanced by putting additional U.S. forces into the country. Secretary Rusk, for example, is thinking in terms of sending the absolute limit on U.S. forces and then leaving the rest of the job up to the South Vietnamese.

~~The group did not address itself to an extremely important question, which is precisely how this package would be presented to the Congress and the country.~~

I have some ideas about this; and I am sure others do also.

As for the Congress, there was a general feeling that ~~this will be a difficult matter, probably possible, but we might confront some extremely ugly and determined opposition from Fulbright, Gore, etc. -- perhaps including a filibuster~~

March 4, 1968

The differences of view about ~~bombing~~ and mining Haiphong were so profound within the group, and other issues so urgently required resolution, that the bombing question ~~was put to one side for separate and later treatment~~

W. Rostow